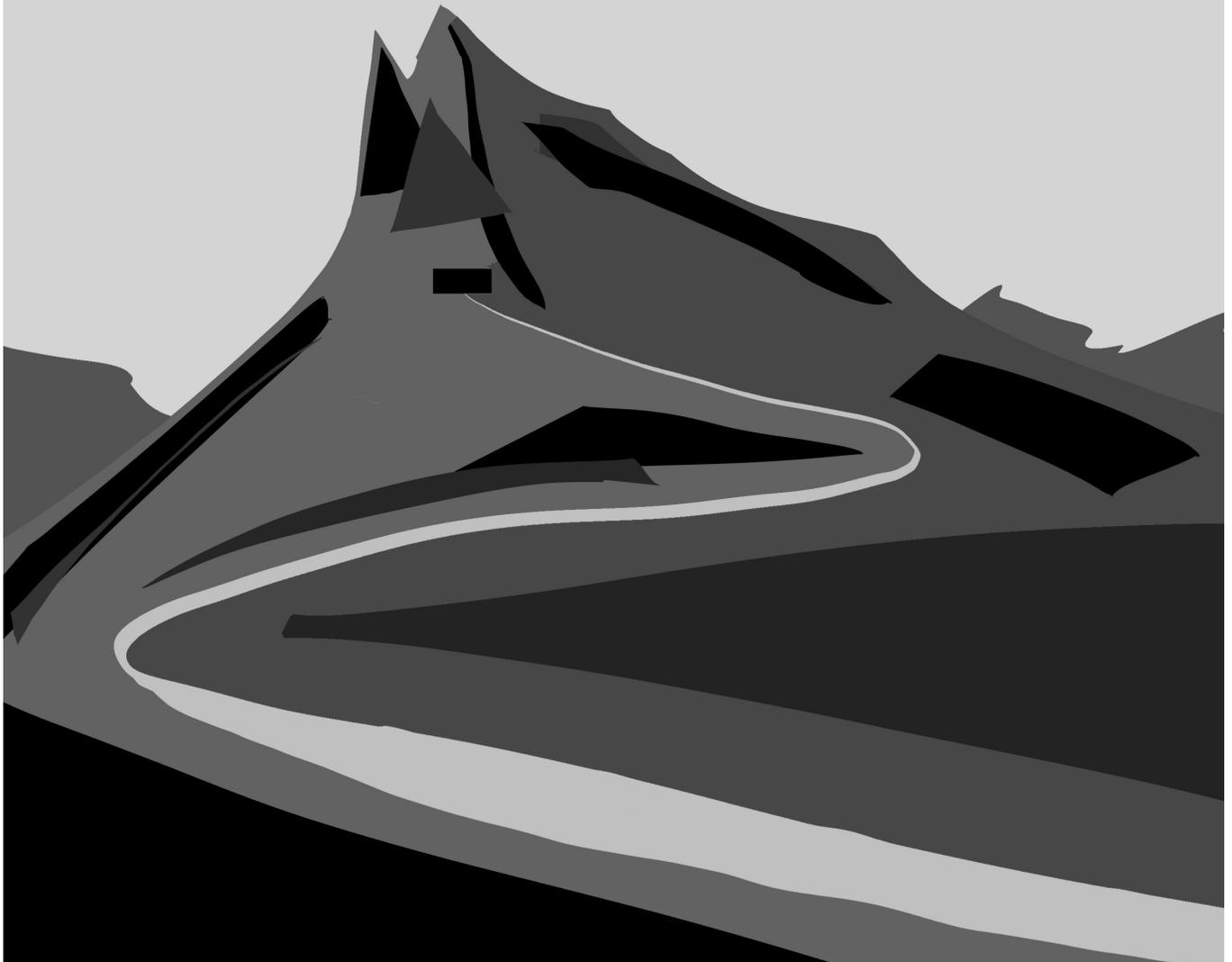


ZÂR



A scenario by Henrik Dithmer for
Fastaval 2022

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Thanks goes to:

My playtesters Henrik, Thomas, Jesper, Just and Matthias, and my fiancée Amra. Without them this game would never have come to fruition.



Introduction:

Zâr is a ritualistic short-form scenario about four theurges trying to banish an evil spirit from the Shah's dreams. It takes about an hour of intense play, and half an hour of pre- and post-game. You are a game facilitator, explaining the rules and setting the scenario's tone, but beyond this you are a player on equal footing with everyone else.

Intro text (read aloud):

It is said the sun always shines on the peaks of Mount Ashkar. Centuries ago the Shah was eternalized in the sacred waters of the mountain cave, and has ever since maintained the Empire's sacred balance, keeping the evil spirits of Angra in check.

It has been a grueling ascent. The wind and the rain has sharpened the cliffs into sharpened blades, the acid in the rain has inflicted you with toxic nightmares, and an ink-black cloud has surrounded the peak itself. As you enter the cave temple, the ink has soiled your clothes, your skin, and your minds.

The droning sounds of the giant apparatus form a surreal background music, as the wires leading into the water is crackling with electricity. What you feared has turned out to be true, as the usually clear waters are now darkened, steaming with the vapours of falsehood. The evil spirit in the Shah's temple must be driven out. It is time for a Zâr.

Before you can begin, you must brief the players in the following:

1. The overall narrative, the tone, and the flow of the scenario.
2. Roles and casting.
3. The mechanics of the game.



Narrative, tone and flow:

The scenario concerns four expert theurges, who are to banish an evil spirit from the Shah's temple. Many generations ago the Shah was transferred to a ritual-mechanical device in a cave near the peak of a sacred mountain, from where they maintain a sacred balance in the empire, destined to last forever. The scenario begins when the theurges are standing in front of the corrupted waters, preparing themselves to journey into the Shah's dreams. The scenario stops after all three dreams have been explored, or an hour in reality has passed - set a timer to mark the start of the scenario. The exorcism will push you to the brink, and in the worst case you will be possessed by the spirit. If you do not make it through all three dreams before the time runs out, the Shah's machinery will break down and the Empire will be fall.

The **setting** is a world in which machinery and mysticism is intricately connected. Humans use machines dedicated to the sacred realm, covered in holy symbols and activated by mystical rites, in order to keep evil spirits at bay, and maintain order in the world. In the periphery lurks Angra, who whispers lies into the ears of humanity, and encourages ambition, power struggles, and speaks of a world teetering on the brink of oblivion.

The **tone** is bleak and serious. If the characters fail, it will destroy the sacred balance, and evil spirits will have free reign in the empire. Even if they succeed, they will probably be changed forever. That being said, in this game "Evil" is a relatively limited thing: Political violence (read: War and oppression) is fair game, while things such as sexual violence and abuse isn't.

The **flow** aims for intensity, and the ideal is to have as little off-game talk as possible. If you are confused about some of the mechanics of the game, feel free to ask questions, but my

experience is that after the first dream everyone is fairly comfortable with the system.

Much of the scenario is focused on your dreamlike narrations, based on the prompts the game gives you. The words on the cards are suggestions, rather than restrictions.

Begin the scenario by reading aloud the intro text, and a short warm-up where you narrate something about your character (there is a prompt on your character sheet), and you're welcome to add some detail to the Shah's cave. Then you change between going in and out of the Shah's dreams. When you are out of the cave there is mostly free play between the characters, while inside the dreams there is a lot more framing by the mechanics of the game. After you have delved into all three dreams there is an epilogue, and the scenario ends.

Casting the scenario isn't that important, no role has any more pressure than the others. Everyone is welcome to look at the roles, but it is important that you do not see the backs of the sheets and accompanying characteristics, since this has information potentially revealed during play.

Each **character sheet** has the following information: There are a few words defining the character, and three traits cut out and placed with the start side up. The traits have some large text to take into consideration when playing the role, and some smaller text with inspiration to use when narrating in the dreams.

(Note: The first names are titles. They can be addressed with either name, and gender is determined by the player)

Mechanics:

The scenario has one central system, which kicks in when you enter the Shah's dreams. There is a set of cards with the PDF, which I'll print for you if you're running this at Fastaval. If you print yourself, I recommend printing on paper thick enough that you cannot see the symbols on the other side.

Before the game begins, everyone shuffles their 5 scene cards. When you enter a dream, each player picks one of their scene-cards at random. The dream is introduced by everyone reading aloud what it says on their card, one by one. The last to read aloud begins exploring the dream by drawing a card and then narrating a bit about how the dream unfolds, based on the prompt on the card, and adding the card to the hand. Then you give the hand to another player, who has the choice whether to explore or cleanse. If exploring, they likewise draw a card and narrate based on it, and then give the hand of cards to another player (who then chooses to explore/cleanse, etc.) You thereby never know exactly what cards are in the pile.

If you draw one of the two apocalypse cards, follow the instructions on the card, which are as follows: First you describe how the world in the dream ends. Then you can choose to either Break one of your own traits (flipping it immediately), and shuffle the apocalypse card back into the pile, or immediately fail the dream (ignoring any negative cards in the pile).

If you choose to cleanse, shuffle the cards, and turn over the top card for all to see. If it is a plus, place it in the middle and narrate how it helps cleanse the dream. If it is a minus, put it in front of yourself, and narrate how you are partially corrupted by the evil in the dream. Then someone else draws a card, and continue the process. The one who chose to cleanse must draw the first and last card in the pile.

There are three circumstances in which the cleansing stops:

1. You have drawn 5 plus cards - narrate how evil is purified from the dream. The dream now counts as successful.
2. You run out of cards to draw - narrate how cleansing the dream ultimately fails. The dream now counts as failed.
3. When you draw a minus card, except the last, you can always choose to give up. You ignore the card just drawn, and narrate how you choose to fail. The dream now counts as failed.

When a cleansing stops, whether it fails or not, look at how many minus cards lie in front of each character. Each card you have breaks one of your traits, flipping it, revealing a new way to play your role, as something your character wants to keep hidden reveals itself. If all your traits are already broken, the character itself breaks, and is flipped.

The Horror: If your character is flipped, you can still assist in cleansing, but your descriptions must be horrible. When your traits break, instead break one of the other players' traits instead.

Once the cleansing is over, you take all the cards and shuffle into a single pile. What follows is a scene outside the dream with free play, until the players decide to start the next dream scene. The only rule here is that if any of your traits have been broken under the preceding dream, you hold a hand on your heart until you have expressed these traits, in one way or the other - the players cannot begin the next dream until all freshly broken traits have been brought into play.

The game continues until you have been through all three dreams, or you run out of time.



Apocalypse:

If Angra was released through running out of time, or all three dreams fail, read the following aloud:

There once was a Shah, who ruled justly and brought harmony to a great empire. He was made into a sacrificial lamb, as the people demanded that this order would be everlasting, so they fastened him to the altar with giant spits, and in a trade for his eternal order, they gave him eternal suffering.

This stopped today, when four bitter people chose not to make the same sacrifice, and the darkness in the Shah's heart was so solidified that it drew the entire empire into the darkness of falsehood. Angra thanks you.

As long as a single dream is successful, the revelation is triggered. The future is revealed to all present, and in order of least to most broken (determine ties however you want), each player answers a question from the list. If you are utterly broken, you answer the question on your sheet instead.

Three good dreams:

- How is order restored in the empire?
- How can you feel that the Shah watches over you?
- How are the minds of the wicked destroyed?
- Why are certain groups interned?

Two good dreams:

- What new government will have to be implemented in the empire?
- What machines of war will the mechanics of the empire build to combat the spawn of Angra?
- What states separate from the empire?
- Why are you forgotten?

One good dream:

- What cult arises from your persons?
- How do people learn to live with famine and forest fires?
- How does Mount Ashkar become Angra's new seat of power?
- Why do the rest of the world look at the empire with worry?

After the revelation we have a final scene between the characters. When you decide to leave the cave, you put your hand on your heart. When everyone has their hand on their heart, the scenario ends.

Endnotes:

Regarding tracking time, it is absolutely best if there is a ticking bomb on the table, but modern phones hate when we don't engage, and usually turn off after a while. I recommend the app Caffeine, which can keep the screen turned on for the duration of the scenario.

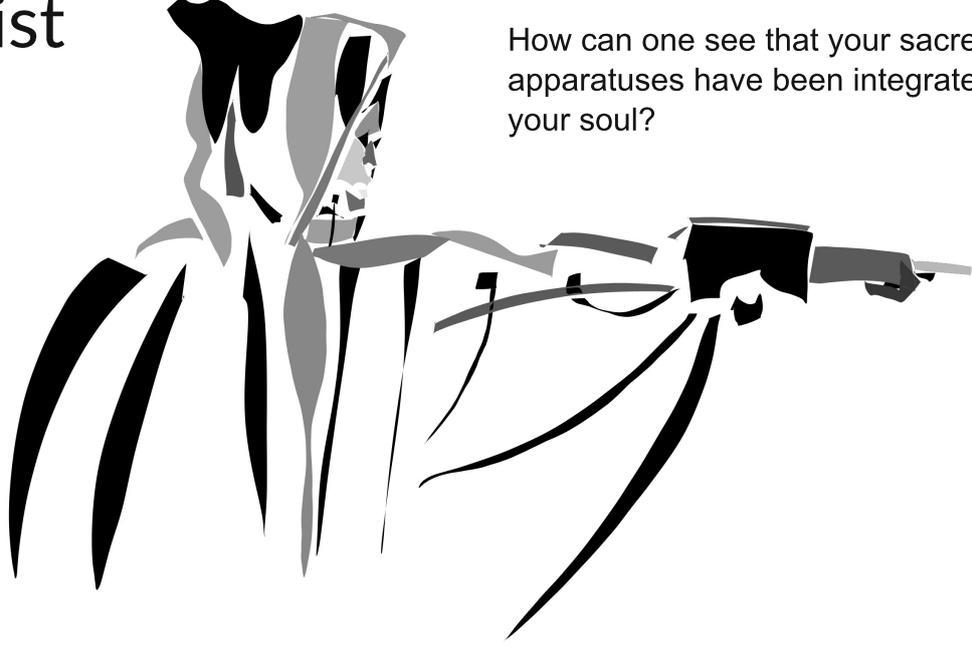
You are naturally welcome to send me questions at hdithmer@gmail.com

Sufi Kairya

Techsorcist

Cool

Curious



Touch on this during your introduction:

How can one see that your sacred apparatuses have been integrated with your soul?

**Waits a bit too long before
answering a question**

Trees bending like creatures in the wind, mental constructs hidden in the shadows, and old libraries with forbidden books

Sufi Kairya Start

**Wires crackling with reddish
electricity, fastened to your body,
and a determined stare**

Abstract forms, shifting pictures, droning music

Sufi Kairya Start

**Dreams of truths being revealed, catastrophes
being counteracted, and heretics being
punished**

People refusing to bend their necks, cyborgs locked in eternal struggle with internal spirits, and thought streams at the speed of light

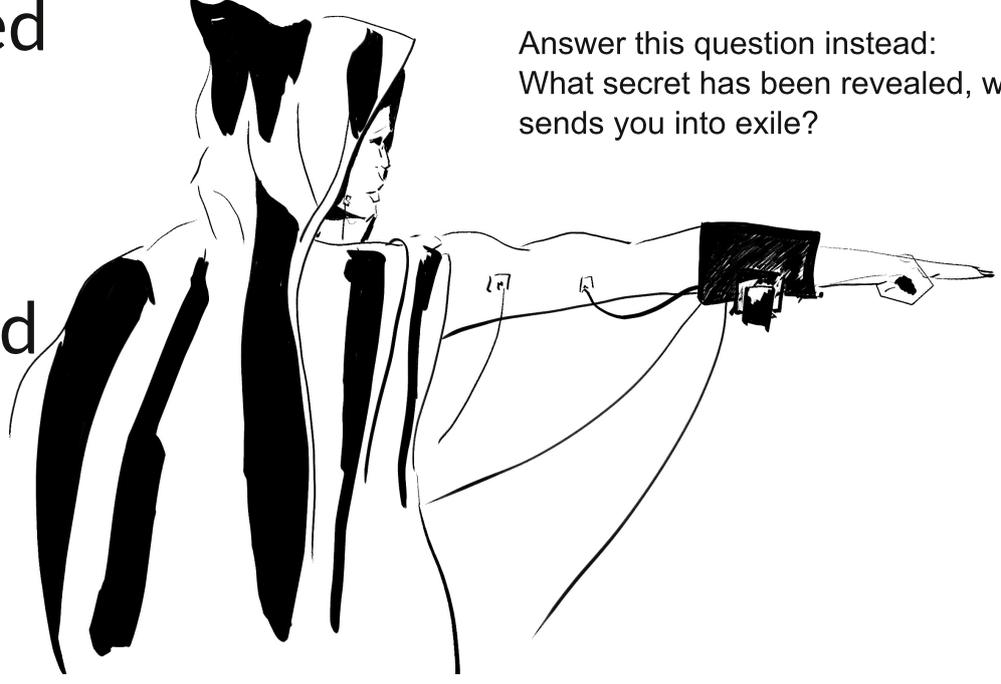
Sufi Kairya Start

Angra Kairya

Awakened

Fanatical

Possessed



Change to epilogue:

Answer this question instead:

What secret has been revealed, which sends you into exile?

Dreams of worlds being turned
upside down, prophets being
crowned, and madmen being elevated

Lost beings rediscovering the will, spirits living in harmony with
their masters, and thought streams beautifully igniting

Wires tearing the skin, sending viscous
blood streaming down your body,
slowly drenching your robe

Exaggerated reality, obvious symbols, forms collapsing

Does not answer questions directly

Natural phenomena reduced to basic lines, archetypical figures,
and books written on floors and walls

Pontifex Anahita

Touch on this during your introduction:

How does the rock fastened on your forehead enable you to see more than most?

High Priest

Warm

Proper



Actively works towards preventing people being interrupted

Palaces gently becoming part of nature, colourful parties at the court, and calm moments among good friends.

Pontifex Anahita Start

Clear eyes, dimples, a flowing robe on the floor.

Flowing watercolour, deep motives, and living figures

Pontifex Anahita Start

Dreams of norms being kept, tall buildings, and true love

Minds unified through sacred technology, artificial intelligence offering dreamlike lighting, and robes crackling with electricity.

Pontifex Anahita Start

Angra Anahita

Changes to epilogue:

Answer this question instead:

How do you turn into a genuine hypocrite?

Domineering

Sensitive

Anxious



Dreams of just kings, dark
dungeons, and forbidden
friendships

Minds degraded in occult rituals, artificial intelligence lurking in the
depths of programming, and clothes strangling their owners

Eyes darkened with ink, and pitch
black stripes in your hair

Muddy colours, featureless figures, and the absence of light

Insists on being heard

Palaces with secret passages, cliques subconsciously excluding,
and blank stares

Aurvanto Thragna

Touch on this during your introduction

How did you acquire the sacred aura which surrounds you?

Bodyguard

Loyal

Friendly



Laughs in the face of danger

Nature billowing in rythmical forms, mountains bravely emerging from the earth, and human bodies enjoying themselves in the sun.

Aurvanto Thragna start

A sacred aura, an encompassing aura, giving Thragna a warm glow

Birds eye perspective, clean lines, and black on white

Aurvanto Thragna start

Dreams of epic battles, bonds that are never broken, and mountains reaching towards the heavens

Sword and spear more loyal than the newest rifle, implants perfectly sliding into place, muscles tightening

Aurvanto Thragna start

Angra Thragna

Change to epilogue:

Answer the following question instead:

Why do you forever forsake the sword, the spear, and the bow?

Prison warden

Submissive

Death driven



Dreams of dim caves, death of old age,
and unbreakable bonds

Warriors suffering death under artillery bombardment, implants
taking over the soul, and muscles snapping

The Aura turns to ink-black
bonds, tightening around
Thragnas body

Frogs eye perspective, bleeding ink, and moth-eaten cloth

Laughs at fear (including their own)

Predators surrounding a wounded deer, a labyrinthine wilderness,
and humans ever seeking shelter

Zaya

Knower of
mechanical
mysteries

Responsible

Conscientious



Touch on this during
your introduction:

Why did you get such
deeply transformative
surgeries and implants in
your body?

Dreams of wonderful machines, worlds
without scarcity, and mysteries in the
known

Cities stretching for hundreds of miles, functionalist architecture,
and machines with sacred symbols

Zaya start

A mechanical face, uncannily imitating
real expressions, interfacing with
mystical mechanisms

Colourful screens, sharp edges, clicking machinery

Zaya start

Eyes calmly observing everything
and everyone in the room

Mechanical limbs, metal winding up walls and columns, and
artificial eyes gazing into the spirit world

Zaya start

Angra Kairya

Change to epilogue:

Instead answer the question: How do you set the downfall of the empire in motion?

Obsessed
with fate

Reproachful

Indicisive



Eyes determinedly staring, but never
on anyone Zaya talks to.

Software with a death drive, metal melting in the furnace of hell,
and humans unaware of their own machinery

Skin peeling off, with only the
mechanical parts of Zaya
remaining

Flashing screens, edges breaking symmetri, and mechanisms
fusing with flesh

Dreams about the end of the world, a world
with no meaning, and death in routine

Endless industrial quarters, dilapidated buildings, and terminals
glowing with red occultism

Instinct



Resistance



Virtue



Sight



Hero



Sword



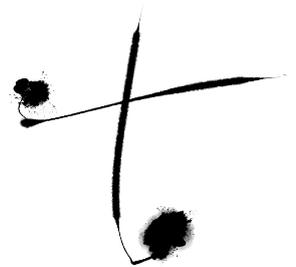
Artificial



Justice



Exploitation



Patience



Paradox



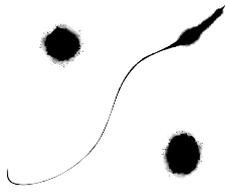
Apocalypse

Describe the end of
the world and
choose:

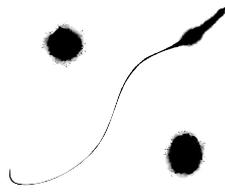
Break one trait and
shuffle back into the
pile; or fail the
dream



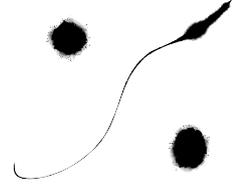
Soldier



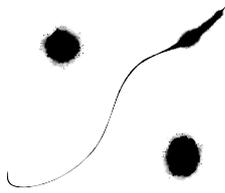
Justice



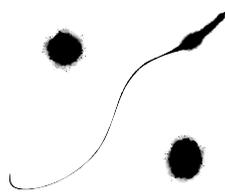
Apathy



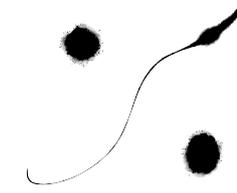
Nonsense



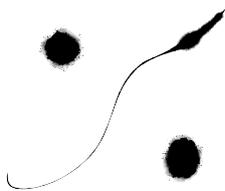
Shame



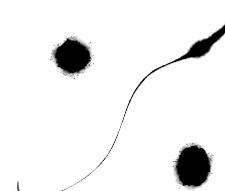
Artificial



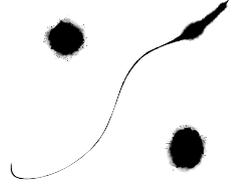
Pity



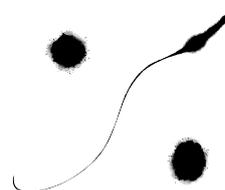
Foreign



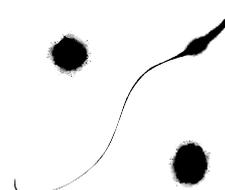
Superficial



Swamp



Conception



Apocalypse

Describe the end of
the world and
choose:

Break one trait and
shuffle back into the
pile; or fail the
dream



Reality (start here)

First scene: introduce characters + free play

When everyone feels prepared, move to dream.

Interlude between dreams: Free play, but if you broke any traits in the preceding dream, put your hand on your chest. You cannot proceed to the next dream before all newly broken traits have come into play. When everyone is ready, move into the next dream.

Epilogue: See the chapter in the rules. Several outcomes depending on how many dreams you have failed, or if you ran out of time.



Dream



- A. Everyone draws a random dream card from their pile, reading aloud.
- B. The last to read aloud, starts by exploring.
- C. The hand is given to someone else, who can choose to either explore or cleanse

Exploring:

When you choose to explore the dream, you draw a card and look at it. If it is a plus or a minus, you narrate something that happens in the dream, adding the card to the hand, and passing the it to another player.

If you draw one of the two apocalypse cards, you must describe how the world ends in the dream, after which you can:

- a. Immediately break one of your own traits, shuffle the card back into the pile, and pass the hand, or:
- b. Fail the dream, and ignore everything in the hand.

Cleansing:

When you choose to cleanse, this is what happens for the rest of the dream. You shuffle the hand, draw a card for everyone to see, and narrate how you start the cleansing. Then you take turns drawing cards, and narrating the cleansing.

If you draw a plus, put it in the middle for everyone to see. If you draw a minus, put it in front of your character sheet.

If five plusses are drawn, the dream succeeds immediately, and you describe how you banish the spirit. Everyone breaks a trait for each minus card they drew.

If five plusses aren't drawn, the dream fails, and you still break a trait per minus card.

When you draw a minus, as long as it isn't the final card, you can always choose to fail. Then the dream fails, and you ignore that minus card you drew.

If all your traits are broken and you are told to break a trait, flip your sheet instead.